

HANDLING OF ANTHRAX INQUIRY QUESTIONED

Search

Ralph R. Frerichs

Bioterrorism

HIV controversies

John Snow site

**UCLA epidemiology
about EPI**

academics

courses & seminars

centers & programs

faculty & preceptors

resources

links

Dept. of Epidemiology
University of California,
Los Angeles (**UCLA**)
School of Public Health
Box 951772

Los Angeles, CA
90095-1772 USA

General Information:
(310) 825-8579

General Fax:
(310) 206-6039

Last Updated
06 Feb 2003

Source: [Washington Post](#), August 25, 2002.

Handling of Anthrax Inquiry Questioned

Scientist's Attorney Criticizes Ashcroft Statements, Accuses FBI of Leaks to Media

By Tom Jackman, Washington Post Staff Writer

An attorney for [Steven J. Hatfill](#), identified by authorities as a "person of interest" in the anthrax investigation, has filed a complaint against Attorney General John D. Ashcroft in addition to one already lodged against the FBI, going on the offensive against the government for keeping the scientist under a public microscope.

Hatfill, 48, is a former virology researcher at the Army's infectious disease research lab at Fort Detrick in Frederick and specializes in training and preparation for bioterror attacks. He has said that he offered his full cooperation to the FBI after the anthrax mailings that killed five people last fall and that he passed a polygraph test. On Aug. 1, when Hatfill says he was still cooperating, the FBI obtained a search warrant and examined his apartment for a second time.

Both FBI searches were accompanied by large media contingents, and Hatfill quickly became the focus of news reports even though he has not been charged. Convinced that the FBI was leaking information, Hatfill held a news conference Aug. 11 to proclaim his innocence and request privacy.

On Friday, Victor M. Glasberg released copies of complaints he filed Aug. 13 with the Office of Professional Responsibility for the Justice Department and the FBI, asking that officials investigate and sanction any improper actions. Glasberg said he had not received a response.

Glasberg also filed a complaint Wednesday against the attorney general, saying that Ashcroft continues to publicly stigmatize Hatfill by describing him as a "person of interest." Glasberg said that discussing Hatfill's status "legitimizes intense scrutiny of every aspect of this uncharged, presumptively innocent person's life. Who among us could withstand such an inquiry? I'd like to see if John Ashcroft could."

Spokesmen for the Justice Department and the FBI would not respond to Glasberg's complaints. Glasberg said Hatfill would make another public statement about the scrutiny today.

In addition to noting that the news media seem to have been tipped to both searches of Hatfill's Frederick apartment, an allegation that the FBI has denied, Glasberg raised these issues in his complaints:

- That a local television station obtained a copy of a fiction manuscript about a bioterror attack on Congress that was available only on the hard drive of Hatfill's computer, which was seized by the FBI. "It would be grossly improper, if not criminal, conduct," Glasberg's complaint states, "for anyone involved in the investigation to have leaked the manuscript."
- That during a search of the residence of Hatfill's girlfriend, she was manhandled and her apartment "trashed." In addition, agents told her that Hatfill "had killed five people." Glasberg said the statements were "unprofessional, actionable and sanctionable."
- That FBI agent Bob Roth ignored Glasberg's offer of Hatfill's cooperation before the search and "may have seriously misrepresented to his superiors the stated willingness of Dr. Hatfill to continue his pattern of cooperation with the government."

Law enforcement officials have said privately that Hatfill is one of as many as 30 "persons of interest" in the investigation, all of whom are being examined because of potential access and expertise in handling anthrax. Authorities say Hatfill has attracted particular attention because of his work in the biological weapons program and his general level of expertise with biological agents. They have painted him as disgruntled and frustrated, with an inflated ego and résumé. At his Aug. 11 news conference, Hatfill said he did not work with anthrax at Fort Detrick and denied any involvement in the attacks.

The FBI has said Hatfill is not a suspect, but Glasberg became further enraged because the attorney general continues to use the phrase "person of interest" to describe Hatfill. Although the FBI has said they do not use the words, Ashcroft used them at a Newark news conference last week when he said, "Mr. Hatfill is a person of interest to the Department of Justice, and we continue the investigation."

Glasberg, in a separate complaint to the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility, wrote that the term is not recognized in law or criminal procedure and that Ashcroft did not have the right "to preside over the public shredding of [Hatfill's] life. This is un-American. Mr. Ashcroft owes Dr. Hatfill an apology."

Glasberg said Friday: "They've got to stop this. They've got to charge him, or they've got to get off his public case."

Glasberg also wrote to the chairmen of the House and Senate judiciary committees on Wednesday repeating the allegations

and asking for an inquiry.

Hatfill said that media and government scrutiny cost him a job at a defense contracting firm in McLean this spring. He was hired to oversee a biodefense training program at Louisiana State University last month but was suspended with pay from that job Aug. 2. Glasberg declined to make Hatfill available for comment Friday.